Folk Tales and Folk Heroes in Euramerican Culture

A Quick Overview of Some Cultural Icons

A Euramerican National Assembly Presentation

AGENDA

- Introduction
- Folk Heroes
- Folk Tales

Introduction

Euramerican Folk Heroes

Folk Heroes

1. Paul Revere
2. The Legend of Johnny Appleseed
3. Paul Bunyan
4. Casey Jones
5. Pecos Bill
6. Mike Fink
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8. Jigger Johnson
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Not Comprehensive, Just an Overview

Paul Revere

Paul Revere’s Ride
By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

LISTEN, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, “If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower as a signal light, —
One, if by land, and two, if by sea;
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm.”

Paul Revere is renowned for:

- **A Sophisticated Intelligence Operation:** He was a key figure in a complex intelligence network established by the Sons of Liberty.

- **The Importance of the Warning:** The ride was a resounding success. By warning John Hancock and Samuel Adams in Lexington and then alerting the countryside, Revere's network successfully mobilized the colonial militia.

- **Heroism as a Team Effort:** He was not fighting alone, but as part of a team.

- **The Real Message:** Revere did not shout, "The British are coming!" as the myth suggests. "The Regulars are coming out!" This highlights his role as a precise intelligence courier, not just a town crier.

Historically, Revere's heroism was that of a dependable, brave, and well-connected patriot who executed a critical mission as part of a larger, organized resistance.

Johnny Appleseed

JOHNNY APPLESEED.

Johnny Appleseed
Stephen Vincent and Rosemary Carr Benét

Of Jonathan Chapman
Two things are known,
That he loved apples,
That he walked alone.

At seventy-odd
He was gnarled as could be,
But ruddy and sound
As a good apple tree.

For fifty years over
Of harvest and dew,
He planted his apples
Where no apples grew.

,,,

Why did he do it?
We do not know.
He wished that apples
Might root and grow.

He has no statue.
He has no tomb.
He has his apple trees
Still in bloom.

Consider, consider,
Think well upon
The marvelous story
Of Appleseed John.

Johnny Appleseed

- John Chapman
- Swedenborgian Christian. Spread the Gospel with his apple trees
- Depicted as a gentle, barefoot wanderer with a pot on his head
- Stories emphasized his kindness, eccentricity, and harmony with nature
- He became a symbol of westward expansion, environmental stewardship, and American pioneer spirit
- His story was popularized through books, Disney films (a 1948 animated short), and schoolroom retellings

Paul Bunyan

Paul Bunyan

- Mythical Folk Hero
- Originated in upper Midwest and Eastern Canada
- A giant lumberjack of impossible size and strength (40’, 50’…. 100’ tall?)
- Good-natured, clever, and hardworking

Paul Bunyan

- Accompanied by Babe the Blue Ox, who was equally enormous
- His footsteps created the 10,000 Lakes of Minnesota
- He dug out the Grand Canyon by dragging his axe behind him
- He cleared the forests of North Dakota in a single day

Paul Bunyan

- His logging camps were so large that men rode on horseback to get from one end of the dinner table to the other
- Babe the Blue Ox measured "42 axe handles and a plug of chewing tobacco" between the eyes
- The Mississippi River was supposedly formed to float his logs downstream

Casey Jones

Casey Jones

- Real Life Hero who died saving others
- Born John Luther Jones in Southern Missouri
- Became a Railroad Engineer
- Casey Jones embodies the **American ideal of the ordinary person performing extraordinary acts of bravery**
- His story resonates with themes of **individual sacrifice for the greater good**
- He represents the **dignity and danger of manual labor** in industrial America
- His legend bridges the gap between **historical fact and folk mythology** — the real events were dramatic enough that relatively little embellishment was needed
- He remains a powerful symbol of the **American railroad era** and its place in the national imagination

Casey Jones

April 30, 1900 – A Single Calamitous night:

- Jones had just completed a run and was exhausted when he was asked to substitute for a sick engineer on the southbound Cannonball Express (Engine No. 382)
- He agreed despite being tired
- His fireman was Sim Webb
- The train departed Memphis about 95 minutes late, and Jones was determined to make up the time
- He pushed the locomotive to high speed, reportedly reaching 75 mph or more
- As they approached Vaughan, Mississippi, they came upon stalled freight trains on the main line ahead
- Jones ordered Sim Webb to jump from the cab
- Jones stayed at the controls, applying the brakes and reducing speed significantly before the collision
- Webb survived; Jones was killed — the only fatality of the wreck

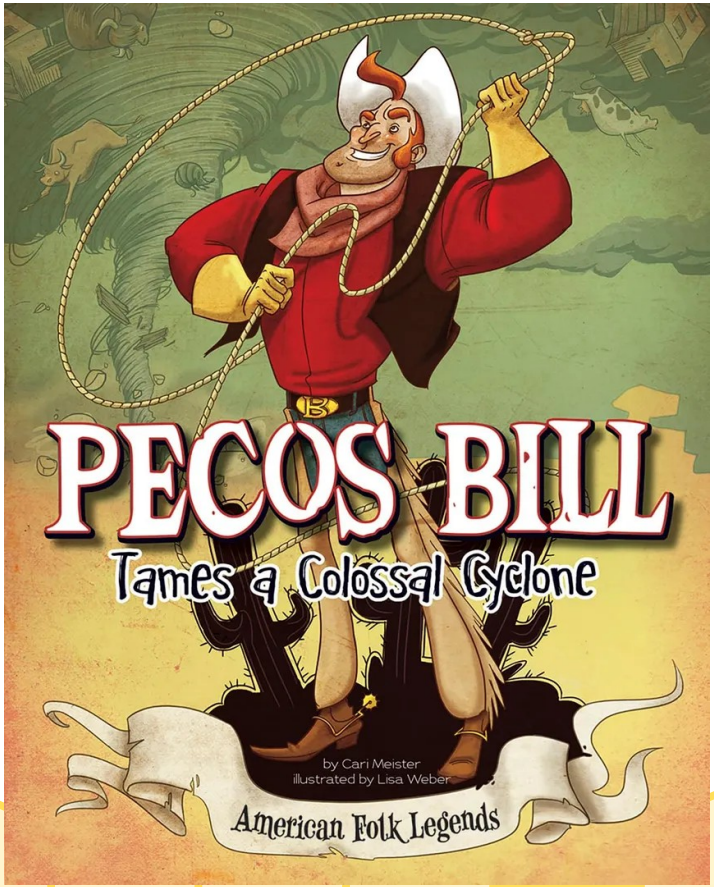
Casey Jones

- Remembered for his bravery and self-sacrifice

Pecos Bill

Pecos Bill

- Pecos Bill is widely attributed to Edward S. O'Reilly, who published stories about the character in **The Century Magazine** in 1917



Pecos Bill

- Folk Story is a tall tale deliberately absurd and humorous
- Bill was supposedly born in Texas in the early frontier days
- As an infant, he fell out of his family's covered wagon while they were crossing the Pecos River (hence his name)
- He was raised by coyotes and grew up believing he was a coyote himself
- He only discovered he was human when a cowboy found him and convinced him he wasn't actually a coyote
- Even after this revelation, he retained extraordinary, almost superhuman abilities from his wild upbringing

Pecos Bill

Riding and Roping

- He could ride anything — no horse or animal could throw him
- He rode a mountain lion using a rattlesnake as a lasso
- He tamed a wild horse named Widow-Maker (sometimes called Lightning) that no one else could ride
- He invented roping, branding, and other cowboy techniques

Pecos Bill

Feats of Nature

- He lassoed a tornado and rode it across the sky — when he was finally thrown off, he created the Grand Canyon (competing with Paul Bunyan for credit)
- He dug the Rio Grande to bring water to his ranch
- He shot out all the stars in the sky except one — the Lone Star, giving Texas its nickname
- He wrung the rain out of clouds during droughts
- He taught broncos how to buck

Pecos Bill

Love Story

- His sweetheart was Slue-Foot Sue, a fearless woman who rode a giant catfish down the Rio Grande
- Their wedding was legendary — Sue insisted on riding Widow-Maker, who bucked her so high she bounced off the moon
- Different versions give this story different endings, some comic, some bittersweet

Pecos Bill

- Pecos Bill embodies the romanticized image of the American cowboy — rugged, independent, fearless, and masterful over nature
- The stories reflect a nostalgic longing for a wilder, freer time that was already passing

Mike Fink

Mike Fink

- Real Life Hero
- King of the Keelboaters
- Keelboats were large, flat-bottomed river vessels that carried cargo and passengers along America's inland waterways before the age of steamboats

Mike Fink

Real Life

- Born 1770 to 1780 near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Died 1823 at Fort Henry, North Dakota
- Fink was the toughest of the toughest keelboatmen

Mike Fink

Tall Tales

- Took to keelboats as a toddler
- Got in shape by wrestling grizzly bears
- Won every racing contest on the rivers
- Could shoot the whiskers off of a man without hitting him

Mike Fink

Known for his Boasting

- I'm a Salt River roarer! I'm a ring-tailed squealer! I'm half wild horse and half cock-eyed alligator and the rest of me is crooked snags and red-hot snappin' turtle!
- I can out-run, out-jump, out-shoot, out-brag, out-drink, and out-fight any man on both sides of the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans and back again!

Mike Fink

- Marksman
- Fighter
- Rough and Tough
- Competitive

Mike Fink's Great Shot.

- Many stories wrote about him in 19th Century

Calamity Jane

Calamity Jane

- Real Life Martha Jane Canary
- Life Mythologized
- Born 1852 Princeton, Missouri
- Family Moved West during childhood
- Orphaned in her young teens

Calamity Jane

- Lived in Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming
- Spent time in mining camps, military posts and frontier settlements of the West
- Later appeared in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show

Calamity Jane

The Myths

- Hard Fightings, Hard Drinking, Sharpshooter
- Frontier scout and dispatch rider
- Bullwhacker and freight hauler — driving ox teams
- Exceptional Horse Rider, shooter

Calamity Jane

She dictated a short autobiography titled "*Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane, By Herself*" - 1896

Calamity Jane

- She claimed extensive service as an Army scout under General Crook
- She described participating in numerous campaigns against Native Americans
- She claimed to have been involved in combat and dangerous missions

Jigger Johnson

Jigger Johnson

Real Life

- Born Albert Lewis Johnson, 1871 New England
- Grew up in logging camps
- Died 1935
- genuine toughness and colorful personality gave rise to a body of legend

Jigger Johnson

- He spent his younger years as a lumberjack in the White Mountains of New Hampshire during the height of the region's logging boom
- He later became a forest ranger and fire warden for the U.S. Forest Service in the White Mountain National Forest

Jigger Johnson

The Legend

- Fighting
- Drinking
- Physically Tough
- Knowledgeable about the woods
- Colorful Storyteller

Jigger Johnson

The Folk Hero

- Tales of impossible feats of strength and endurance
- Stories of barroom brawls and confrontations with authority
- Accounts of wilderness survival and woodsmanship
- Humorous anecdotes about his eccentricities and defiance of convention

Molly Pitcher

Molly Pitcher

- Not a single woman
- Many “Molly Pitchers”
- Composite Legend
- Performed outstanding support during the American Revolutionary War

Molly Pitcher

- During and immediately after the Revolution, stories circulated about women who helped in battles
- These were oral traditions within communities and among veterans
- No single "Molly Pitcher" story had yet crystallized

Molly Pitcher

- As the Revolutionary generation died off, there was a surge of interest in preserving their stories
- Historians and patriotic organizations began collecting and publishing Revolutionary War accounts
- The Molly Pitcher story appeared in various forms in books, newspapers, and popular histories
- Different versions named different women or left the woman unnamed

Molly Pitcher

Molly Pitcher

- Gave Women Honor and Recognition for their role in supporting the Revolutionary War

Summary

- Our ancestors lived hard lives which often demanded overwhelming drive just to survive. Think of clearing wild land of trees, plowing farms, raising crops, facing starvation if bugs or rain arrived, murderous indians, traveling long distances with threats of starvation or dehydration.

- Tales of Great Deeds inspired our ancestors
- Tall tales made their own lives livable and meaningful
- Helped them aspire to survive hardships and attain greater things

The End